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ABSTRACT

As part of Tennessee's educational needs assessment strategy, a study was conducted to determine parental perceptions of educational needs. In 1971, 3,150 copies of two forms (randomly distributed) of the School Assessment Questionnaire for Parents were distributed to the parents in six target school systems. Data were analyzed using the Sigma-9 Xerox Computer System. The survey demonstrated a methodology for conducting a statewide assessment of parental attitudes toward public education and provided a quantified measure of parents' perceptions about public education in Tennessee. Findings indicated that parents were satisfied with many facets of the public school program. Areas for which educational change was indicated included programmatic needs and improvements in operations. Parents indicated a willingness to pay higher taxes in support of public education. (KM)

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ABSTRACT

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN TENNESSEE AS PERCEIVED BY PARENTS OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS

PURPOSE

The educational needs assessment strategy conducted in Tennessee was developed on the premise that educational needs are derived from the society served by the schools. Since the public-supported school system depends upon parental support and cooperation for their programs, any effort to determine educational needs must include parental perceptions of those needs.

METHODOLOGY

In the spring of 1971, 3,150 copies of the School Assessment Questionnaire for Parents were distributed to the parents in six target school systems. Both forms of the questionnaire were randomly distributed in approximately equal numbers in each school system. The data obtained in the survey were analyzed using the Sigma-9 Xerox Computer System. Two statistical techniques were employed in the analysis: the chi-square technique and frequency-percentage distributions.

RESULTS

The survey of parental attitudes toward public education in Tennessee accomplished two purposes: (1) it demonstrated a methodology for conducting a statewide assessment of parental attitudes toward public education; and (2) the survey provided a quantified measure of parents' perceptions about public education in Tennessee. The findings indicated that parents were satisfied with many facets of the public school program. The scope and degree of parental satisfaction constituted a sound basis for attacking educational problems. The results further indicated that there are areas in which educational changes were needed.

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN TENNESSEE AS PERCEIVED BY PARENTS OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS[1]

by

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INTRODUCTION

The educational needs assessment strategy employed in Tennessee was developed on the premise that educational needs are derived from the society served by the schools. Earlier applications of this strategy centered on the school-related population of the society, i.e., administrations, teachers, and students. During the 1970 - 1971 school year, information was sought from the sub-population groups which were external to the schools and the parents. In particular, this research paper describes the application of assessment techniques to a sampling of parents of public school students in the state of Tennessee.

The assessment was predicated upon the basic assumption that data about the educational needs in the public schools of Tennessee was important and useful to the extent that it addressed itself to questions of primary concern to society. It was felt that parents have a multiple relationship with the schools, i.e., providing necessary financial support, supplying their children as i puts and outputs, and participating as a component in the decision-making apparatus that determines school programs.

Parents have perceptions about the schools and how they affect children as well as how they should affect children. Since the public-supported school system depends on parental support and cooperation for their programs, any effort to determine educational needs must include parental perceptions of those needs.

METHODOLOGY

The description of the methodology used in this needs assessment survey includes the research design, instrumentation, sampling procedures, dat

collection procedures, and treatment of the data.

Research Design

This study was basically a descriptive survey that incorporated the procedures employed in public opinion polling conducted by Gallup, Harris, and Roper. Although the use of public opinion polling has generally been ignored in the field of education, this study applied its techniques to education on a statewide basis.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument used in this study to gather attitudinal data was the School Assessment Questionnaire for Parents which was developed by the Bureau of Educational Research and Services, College of Education, Memphis State University. Several instruments were found that dealt with parental attitude toward a particular school system, but they were not adaptable for statewide assessment of parental attitudes toward the public schools.

A modified Delphi Technique was used in the development of the survey instrument. A panel of experts from Memphis State University and the Memphis City Schools System was selected to participate in this task and was instructed to select for inclusion in the instrument twenty-five items from a list of over three hundred items that had been gathered from various sources by the Bureau staff. After an independent review of the items by the panel members, they met as a group to formulate their recommendations. From their deliberations, thirty-five items were selected for use in development of the survey instruments. The items were then divided into two parallel forms, each of which contained five common items and fifteen unique items for a total of twenty items. This length was recommended by the National School Public Relations Association as a maximum for public opinion polling instruments.

Three broad categories were established for generating and selecting items

for inclusion in the instrument:

(1) Parental Satisfaction with the Schools

The purpose of these items was to solicit the perceptions of parents concerning the operation of schools in their school system. The areas of concern included instruction, administration, and facilities. The items selected for inclusion were worded to assess parental attitudes about the school system in general.

(2) Parental Relationship with the Schools

The items included under this category were constructed to accomplish two tasks (not necessarily in one item): (1) to ascertain parental participation with the schools, e.g., attend PTA meetings and visit the schools, and (2) to determine the relationship between the parents and the school, i.e., the communications between parents and school system personnel.

(3) Curriculum Needs as Perceived by the Parents

The items included under this heading related to the curriculum needs of the schools as perceived by the parents. The basis for accepting or rejecting items in this area was: Does the item deal with the curriuclar or cocurricular experiences that the school is providing for them?

Sampling

The population for this study was the parents of all students attending the public schools in the state of Tennessee during the academic year 1970-71. Three specified grade levels - fifth, eighth, and eleventh - were chosen as representative of the elementary, junior high, and senior high school sub-populations of the state.

A random, stratified sample was made of the grades. The specific sampling technique was based upon the model described and reported in the Design for

Tennessee Assessment and Evaluation of Title III, E.S.E.A., a model that has three variables: (1) area of the state, (2) population density, and (3) economic level. In each of the four geographic areas, the population density and economic level variables were combined to produce a description of each county. Six types of descriptions applicable to either a county or community were produced: (1) High Population Density - Upper Economic Level; (2) Medium Population Density - Upper Economic Level; (3) Low Population Density - Low Upper Economic Level; (4) High Population Density - Low Economic Level; (5) Medium Population Density - Lower Economic Level; and (6) Low Population Density - Lower Economic Level.

A modified cross-over design was used to select the specific types of school systems from each of the four geographic areas of the state. Only the economic level and population density combinations were used; the area factor was not included. Because the concern was only with generalizing to the state of Tennessee as a whole, no attempt was made to include systems from each area that represented all of the existing population density and economic level combinations. Six school systems were identified as being representative of the state on the basis of the above factors: Henry County; Knoxville City; Morgan County; Robertson County; Washington County; and Weakley County. In each of these six school systems a contact person distributed 175 survey instruments to the parents of students in each of the three grade levels selected for participation in the survey.

Data Collection Procedures

The following procedures were used in gathering the data for the survey:

(1) The Tennessee State Department of Education was contacted to provide assistance in identifying and contacting the target school systems.

(2) The Bureau of Educational Research and Services at Memphis State

University provided the Tennessee State Department of Education with a list of school districts previously identified in the sampling procedure.

(3) From the list, the Tennessee State Department of Education selected and contacted persons from each of the school systems involved in the study and provided the Bureau with their names.

(4) The investigator prepared a letter of instruction about distribution of the survey forms and forwarded it and 525 forms for distribution to each of the contact persons in six school systems.

(5) The contact person was requested to return the completed questionnaires by a predetermined date.

(6) Upon receipt of the completed survey questionnaires, the data were extracted from each form and recorded on coding sheets that were forwarded to the Memphis State University Computing Center for keypunching and analysis.

Treatment of the Data

The data obtained in this survey were analyzed by using the Sigma-9 Xerox Computer System. Two statistical procedures were employed in the analyis: the chi-square statistical technique and frequency percentage distribtuions. The chi-square technique was used to compare sub-population distributions. The frequency percentage distributions were used with the total group of respondents and were computed for each item for item analysis.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

In the spring of 1971, 3,150 copies of the School Assessment Questionnaire for Parents were distributed in the six target school systems to the parents of children in the fifth, eighth, and eleventh grades. Both forms of the questionnaire were randomly distributed in approximately equal numbers in each school system. The data obtained from the administration of the question-

naire were tabulated for each item to reveal the frequency distribution for each response category. The frequency percentage distribution of responses was recomputed for each item (see Table 1).

Sub-population Analysis

Chi-square analyses of the data were performed to examine differences in response distributions of the sub-populations. The sub-population characteristics and the categories that were used in the analyses were: age (34 or less, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65 or more); six (male or female); education of respondent, by years (8 or less, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 or more); race (black, white, other); occupation of principal wage earner (professional, semi-professional, technical, semi-skilled, unskilled, other); and number of school-age children, grades 1-12 (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or more).

The chi-square analyses were conducted for each item in the questionnaire using the .05 level of significance to compare differences. A significant chi-square value indicates that there are significant differences in the distribution of responses when respondents are classified according to a particular variable. A review revealed only three items without a significant chi-square value on any classification variable. The order of the sub-population classification variables from the largest to the smallest number of items with significant chi-square values was education of respondent (25 items), occupation of principal wage earner (25 items), race (21 items), six (14 items), age (6 items), and number of school-age children (3 items), (see Table 2).

Item Analysis

Based on the analysis of the responses to the School Assessment Questionnaire for Parents, three categories of items were identified:

(1) statements about present conditions or factors with which a majority of the respondents were satisfied;

(2) statements about needs or change-facilitating conditions based on the perceptions of a majority of the respondents; and

(3) statements about conditions or factors toward which respondents expressed indecision.

A majority of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the school conditions and factors represented by the thirteen items in Category 1: (1) general attitude toward the school system; (2) extent to which parents' wishes are considered in school planning; (3) balanced emphasis in the physical education program; (4) adequacy of discipline in the schools; (5) teacher help for students who need special attention; (6) value of school learning for meeting students' future needs; (7) level of interest created by presentation of curriculum content; (8) degree of adoption of new methods and programs; (9) use of spanking to discipline students; (10) emphasis of social affairs by school officials; (11) appropriate level of difficulty of school subjects; (12) adequacy of the job teachers are doing; and (13) familiarity with child's teachers.

The sixteen items in Category 2 represent areas in which a majority of the respondents perceived that some ameliorative action would be desirable by the public schools or supported by it; (1) increased taxes for educational programs; (2) teaching the history of Americans of different races and national origins; (3) more use of school buildings during vacation periods; (4) need for more guidance counselors; (5) differentiated salary schedule for high quality teachers; (6) need for more teachers to work with students who have needs related to physical or mental problems; (7) acceptability of spending tax money for kindergartens and nursery schools; (8) more men teachers in elementary schools; (9) instruction in sex education by specially trained teachers; (10) desirability of student participation in educational policy making; (11) free-

ing guidance counselors from clerical duties; (12) increased accountability of teachers and administrators for students' progress; (13) use of tax money for evening schools for young people and adults; (14) shortage of school equipment; (15) more job training for students who do not plan to go to college; and (16) instruction concerning the effects of drup misuse.

The respondents reflected indecision or a lack of consenses about the factors represented by the six items in Category 3. The items concern: (1) desirability of encouraging teachers and parents to participate in formulating school policies; (2) degree to which student initiative and creativity are encouraged in school; (3) amount of cooperation between the school board and other community groups; (4) four-quarter school year; (5) adequacy of teachers' salaries to attract capable people; and (6) degree to which schools are overcrowded.

CONCLUSIONS

The survey of parental attitudes toward public education in Tennessee accomplished two purposes. First, it demonstrated a methodology for conducting a statewide assessment of parental attitudes toward public education. The procedures employed in the study may be utilized with various sub-population groups to provide information for educational planning. Parental perceptions about educational needs may be a significant factor in designing school programs to better serve society.

Second, the survey provided a quantified measure of parents' perceptions about public education in Tennessee. The findings indicated that parents were satisfied with many facets of the public school program. The scope and degree of parental satisfaction constituted a sound basis for attacking educational

problems. The results also indicated, either directly or indirectly, that there are areas in which educational changes are needed. Programmatic needs and improvements in the operations of the public schools were indentified in the analysis. A basis for obtaining the required resources to implement programs to alleviate these needs seems to exist as indicated by the willingness of parents to pay higher taxes in support of public education. The responses indicated that parents were undecided about only a few facets of the public schools in Tennessee. Most importantly, however, these factors may represent potential areas of need.

In summary, the assessment of parental attitudes toward the public schools in Tennessee indicated that there were many aspects of the public schools which were viewed favorably by parents. The survey also highlighted several areas that educators should consider in planning and improving education. The educational needs, as perceived by parents, constitute a significant element in the total effort to identify needs and to design programs to improve the quality of education available to the public school students in Tennessee.

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES
TO QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

Item No.		Response Choices A	B	C	D	E	No Response	Total
1	Frequency	450	1,042	182	336	79	13	2,102
	Percent	(21.4)	(49.6)	(8.7)	(16.0)	(3.8)	(0.6)	(100.1)*
2	Frequency	338	866	416	321	137	24	2,102
	Percent	(16.1)	(41.2)	(19.8)	(15.3)	(6.5)	(1.1)	(100.0)
3	Frequency	459	590	445	210	363	35	2,102
	Percent	(21.8)	(28.1)	(21.2)	(10.0)	(17.3)	(1.7)	(100.1)*
4	Frequency	705	694	384	133	151	35	2,102
	Percent	(33.5)	(33.0)	(18.3)	(6.3)	(7.2)	(1.7)	(100.0)
5	Frequency	213	219	1,116	254	157	143	2,102
	Percent	(10.1)	(10.4)	(53.1)	(12.1)	(7.5)	(6.8)	(100.0)
6	Frequency	392	266	220	76	67	10	1,031
	Percent	(38.0)	(25.8)	(21.3)	(7.4)	(6.5)	(1.0)	(100.0)
7	Frequency	49	148	218	368	196	52	1,031
	Percent	(4.8)	(14.4)	(21.1)	(35.7)	(19.0)	(5.0)	(100.0)
8	Frequency	424	312	156	71	54	14	1,031
	Percent	(41.1)	(30.3)	(15.1)	(6.9)	(5.2)	(1.4)	(100.0)
9	Frequency	166	230	478	52	87	18	1,031
	Percent	(16.1)	(22.3)	(46.4)	(5.0)	(8.4)	(1.7)	(99.9)*
10	Frequency	33	347	277	269	34	71	1,031
	Percent	(3.2)	(33.7)	(26.9)	(26.1)	(3.3)	(6.9)	(100.1)*
11	Frequency	198	292	221	108	191	21	1,031
	Percent	(19.2)	(28.3)	(21.4)	(10.5)	(18.5)	(2.0)	(99.9)*
12	Frequency	511	344	116	21	17	22	1,031
	Percent	(49.6)	(33.4)	(11.3)	(2.0)	(1.6)	(2.1)	(100.0)
13	Frequency	378	265	120	114	148	6	1,031
	Percent	(36.7)	(25.7)	(11.6)	(11.1)	(14.4)	(0.6)	(100.1)*
14	Frequency	169	465	187	115	77	18	1,031
	Percent	(16.4)	(45.1)	(18.1)	(11.2)	(7.5)	(1.7)	(100.0)
15	Frequency	205	465	152	164	37	8	1,031
	Percent	(19.9)	(45.1)	(14.7)	(15.9)	(3.6)	(0.8)	(100.0)
16	Frequency	66	160	609	142	35	19	1,031
	Percent	(6.4)	(15.5)	(59.1)	(13.8)	(3.4)	(1.8)	(100.0)

*Totals do not equal 100.0 due to rounding error.

Item No.		Response Choices A	B	C	D	E	No Response	Total
17	Frequency	166	391	372	57	18	27	1,031
	Percent	(16.1)	(37.9)	(36.1)	(5.5)	(1.7)	(2.6)	(99.9)*
18	Frequency	314	261	111	74	8	8	776
	Percent	(30.5)	(25.3)	(25.5)	(10.8)	(7.2)	(0.8)	(100.1)*
19	Frequency	92	110	548	126	84	71	1,031
	Percent	(8.9)	(10.7)	(53.2)	(12.2)	(8.1)	(6.9)	(100.0)
20	Frequency	203	305	228	104	72	31	1,031
	Percent	(19.7)	(38.1)	(22.1)	(10.1)	(7.0)	(3.0)	(100.0)
21	Frequency	219	472	157	102	114	7	1,071
	Percent	(20.4)	(44.1)	(14.7)	(9.5)	(10.6)	(0.7)	(100.0)
22	Frequency	256	268	221	115	206	5	1,071
	Percent	(23.9)	(25.0)	(20.6)	(10.7)	(19.2)	(0.5)	(99.9)*
23	Frequency	688	219	99	38	20	7	1,071
	Percent	(64.2)	(20.4)	(9.2)	(3.5)	(1.9)	(0.7)	(99.9)*
24	Frequency	209	262	175	207	210	8	1,071
	Percent	(19.5)	(24.5)	(16.3)	(19.3)	(19.6)	(0.7)	(99.9)*
25	Frequency	433	321	63	103	147	4	1,071
	Percent	(40.4)	(30.0)	(5.9)	(9.6)	(13.7)	(0.4)	(100.0)
26	Frequency	50	87	553	264	86	31	1,071
	Percent	(4.7)	(8.1)	(51.6)	(24.6)	(8.0)	(2.9)	(99.9)*
27	Frequency	356	322	254	97	31	11	1,071
	Percent	(33.2)	(28.7)	(18.0)	(9.9)	(9.4)	(0.7)	(99.9)*
28	Frequency	356	307	193	106	101	8	1,071
	Percent	(33.2)	(28.7)	(18.0)	(9.9)	(9.4)	(0.7)	(99.9)*
29	Frequency	152	212	195	214	292	6	1,071
	Percent	(14.2)	(19.8)	(18.2)	(20.0)	(27.3)	(0.6)	(100.1)*
30	Frequency	20	140	776	84	42	9	1,071
	Percent	(1.9)	(13.1)	(72.5)	(7.8)	(3.9)	(0.8)	(100.0)
31	Frequency	107	172	199	208	379	6	1,071
	Percent	(10.0)	(16.1)	(18.6)	(19.4)	(35.4)	(0.6)	(100.1)*
32	Frequency	796	177	41	32	17	8	1,071
	Percent	(74.3)	(16.5)	(3.8)	(3.0)	(1.6)	(0.7)	(99.9)*
33	Frequency	165	523	329	28	16	10	1,071
	Percent	(15.4)	(48.8)	(30.7)	(2.6)	(1.5)	(0.9)	(99.9)*
34	Frequency	205	555	140	100	62	9	1,071
	Percent	(19.1)	(51.8)	(13.1)	(9.3)	(5.8)	(0.8)	(99.9)*
35	Frequency	912	87	38	12	15	7	1,071
	Percent	(85.2)	(8.1)	(3.5)	(1.1)	(1.4)	(0.7)	(100.0)

TABLE 2

SUMMARY TABLE OF CHI-SQUARE ANALYSES
BY ITEM AND SUBPOPULATION VARIABLE

Item No.	Subpopulation Classification Variables					
	Age	Sex	Education of Respondent	Race	Occupation of Principal Wage Earner	Number of School Age Children
1			X	X	X	
2		X		X	X	
3		X	X	X	X	X
4		X	X	X	X	
5	X		X		X	
6			X		X	
7	X	X		X		
8			X		X	
9					X	
10	X	X	X	X	X	X
11		X	X		X	
12			X			
13		X		X	X	
14						
15		X	X	X	X	
16			X	X	X	
17			X	X	X	
18			X		X	
19	X		X		X	
20			X		X	
21		X	X	X	X	
22			X		X	

TABLE 2 (Cont'd.)

Item No.	Subpopulation Classification Variables					
	Age	Sex	Education of Respondent	Race	Occupation of Principal Wage Earner	Number of School Age Children
23		X		X		
24	X		X		X	X
25		X		X		
26						
27			X	X		
28		X	X	X	X	
29			X	X	X	
30		X	X	X	X	
31			X	X	X	
32						
33			X	X		
34	X		X	X	X	
35		X		X		

X denotes significant Chi-square values.